

Government of the District of Columbia
Department of Health

Health Regulation & Licensing
Administration
Animal Services Program



September 5, 2012

LaVonne Taliaferro-Bunch
Principal
Miner Elementary School
601 15th St NE
Washington, DC 20002

Re: Animals housed at Miner Elementary School

Dear Ms. Taliaferro-Bunch,

On July 30, 2012 Ms. Marcia Parker, a staff member, at Miner Elementary School, surrendered a deceased guinea pig to the DC Animal Care and Control Facility. Although the carcass was in good overall condition, the situation was referred to the Washington Humane Society's Humane Educator, Ms. Shakela Brown. Ms. Brown visited the school and compiled an inventory of animals kept at Miner Elementary and forwarded it to me.

The inventory (provided August 1, 2012) is as follows: one (1) bird, six (6) Bearded Dragons, one (1) Fat Tailed Gecko, three (3) Leopard Geckos, three (3) Scorpions, one (1) Tortoise, one (1) African Side Neck Turtle, one (1) Red Painted Turtle, four (4) fish tanks, one (1) Ball Python, four (4) Rats, two (2) Chameleons, two (2) Tarantulas, two (2) Red-eyed Tree Frogs, six (6) Fire Belly Toads, and twelve (12) tadpoles.

I am writing to clarify laws involving animals kept in school so you can ensure that Miner Elementary is in good legal standing. There are a number of laws that govern animals kept at schools:

- DC Official Code § 8-1851.01 states: "Only animals of appropriate size and temperament suitable to a classroom environment shall be introduced into the classroom. Use of such animals shall be for instructional purposes only."
- DC Official Code § 8-1851.02(a) states: "Animals kept in schools shall be provided sufficient food and water, be cared for in a safe and humane manner, and remain in schools during holidays only if provided adequate care."
- DC Official Code § 8-1851.02(b) states: "Animals no longer needed in the classroom should be adopted out to a suitable home or given to a local humane organization for adoption."

- DC Official Code § 8-1808(h)(1) states: “DC Official Code 8-1808(h)(1): Except as provided in this subsection, no person shall import into the District, possess, display, offer for sale, trade, barter, exchange, or adoption, or give as a household pet any living member of the animal kingdom including those born or raised in captivity, except the following: domestic dogs (excluding hybrids with wolves, coyotes, or jackals), domestic cats (excluding hybrids with ocelots or margays), domesticated rodents and rabbits, captive-bred species of common cage birds, nonpoisonous snakes, fish, and turtles, traditionally kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes, and racing pigeons (when kept in compliance with permit requirements).”

The exemptions referenced in DC Official Code § 8-1808(h)(1) are for federally licensed animal exhibitors, licensed wildlife rehabilitators, veterinarians, and animal shelters. There is no exemption for educational institutions.

The bearded dragons, geckos, scorpions, chameleons, tarantulas, frogs, toads, and tadpoles are illegal and must be removed from the District of Columbia immediately.

You must also ensure that the remaining tortoise, turtles, fish, snake, and rats are linked to your curricular standards and used for specific instructional purposes. Upon completion of the standard or unit where an animal is used it must be given a home off the premises of the school or surrendered to an animal shelter, rather than housing the animals in staff offices.

I have requested that DC Animal Control Officers visit the school after instructional hours to ensure that all illegal species have been removed. Any animals that are prohibited in the District of Columbia will be seized. If you have questions about the legal requirements for animals in schools, please contact me at (202) 535-2508.

Sincerely,



Molly Lunaris
Program Specialist

cc: Raymond Noll, Director of Animal Control Field Services, Washington Humane Society
Shakela Brown, Humane Educator, Washington Humane Society
Jacqueline Gartrell, Instruction Superintendent, Cluster V, DC Public Schools